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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: NICARAGUA: ARMS/SECURITY TEAMS ABOARD MERCHANT VESSELS

REF: SECSTATE 45331

¶1. (U) On July 1, Econoff and visiting U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) International Port Security Liaison Officer delivered reftel demarche to representatives of Nicaragua's three port and maritime security agencies, the National Port Agency (EPN), the Ministry of Transportation's Office of Aquatic Transportation (MTI-DGTA), and the Naval Forces of Nicaragua.

The three authorities jointly regulate port and maritime security. Their representatives stated that current Nicaraguan law and security regulations restrict vessels employing armed security teams or with armed crews from entering Nicaraguan ports.

¶2. (U) The Nicaraguan port security agency representatives present at the meeting were Javier Morales, Director of Port Security for EPN; Hugo Lopez Sanchez, the Deputy Director-General of the Ministry of Transportation's MTI-DGTA; and Salvador Santos Montoya, the Chief of the Port Captains' Section of the Naval Forces of Nicaragua. They stated that crew members must have permission to carry weapons in Nicaragua and that vessels visiting Nicaraguan territory must declare arms and explosives on board. Crews and security teams would have to surrender weapons to port security authorities upon entering a Nicaraguan port. Arms would be returned to the vessels upon their departure.

¶3. (U) The port security representatives recognized that while armed security teams may be an appropriate measure to deter pirate attacks off the Horn of Africa, security for merchant ships in Nicaraguan waters came under their authority. The Naval Forces are authorized to inspect ships and fishing boats in Nicaraguan waters, and the National Port Agency maintains a patrol ship to provide security for ships entering Nicaraguan ports.

¶4. (U) Nicaragua is signatory to the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS), and its ports are required to comply with the International Ship and Port Facility Security (ISPS) Code. The U.S. Coast Guard International Port Security (IPS) Team last reviewed Nicaragua's implementation of the ISPS Code in 2007 and found that the country had substantially implemented it. The USCG plans to conduct another review of ISPS-designated Nicaraguan ports in 2009.

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